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U.S. Reportedly Had Contact With the P.L.O. for 9 Months

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 18 — For a period of nine months, the Reagan Administration conducted secret discussions through an intermediary with Yasir Arafat, the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, according to American participants in the effort.

They said that the purpose of the talks was consistent with past attempts by the Carter Administration to persuade the Palestinian leaders to accept the American offer of recognition of their organization in return for acceptance by the P.L.O. of Israel's right to exist. After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, the talks were broken off by the P.L.O. with no certain sign that they were succeeding.

The intermediary was John Edwin Mroz, a specialist on Middle Eastern and Soviet affairs, who heads a New York-based foundation.

Clandestine Contacts

Clandestine Central Intelligence Agency contacts have been maintained for security and intelligence matters, officials said. But any effort to discuss ways of bringing about recognition of the Liberation Organization or any issue involving Arab-Israeli matters has had to be conducted through intermediaries.

Under the Carter Administration, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance made a vigorous effort, working through the Saudis, to get the Palestinians to meet the American conditions. The P.L.O. had always objected to accepting Resolution 242 because that 1967 document contains no reference to the Palestinian question, except by implication as "the refugee problem."

President Carter said that if the P.L.O. accepted Resolution 242, and then said it believed that the resolution was inadequate, the United States would regard that as sufficient for United States recognition.

But Mr. Arafat's group, arguing that it was being given different signals from different intermediaries, refused to meet those terms.

Carter Effort Continued

Essentially, the Reagan Administration, working through Mr. Mroz, was continuing the Carter effort.

Mr. Mroz, in an interview, confirmed that he served as the intermediary. Asked why he did it, he said, "If I could get Arab recognition of Israel, there's nothing I could do that would be more important in my life."